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ABSTRACT

An ethnographic study examined the sense of the social world as a natural order produced by the organizational members of one sales team at a New York media representation firm. Communication was observed and recorded over a ten-week period, and members of the sales team were interviewed during an additional two-week period. Results indicated that sexism had achieved the status of fact within the organization's culture. Considerable observation of the organizational culture of the subject sales team showed that there is not one culture but two--the corporate culture and the female subculture of the sales assistants. The complementary nature of the female subculture and the corporate culture is a key to how the sense of the natural order is preserved by the organizational members, providing them with a sense of continuity, balance, and completeness, while, at the same time, furnishing the sales assistants with a domain and a set of activities of their own. Findings suggest that the preservation and maintenance of the existing order of the subject sales team is a social accomplishment produced by both the corporate culture and the female subculture. (Extensive footnotes and a bibliography are appended.) (NKA)

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"That's the Way It Is":

The Construction of Organizational Culture

Janet Farrell Leontiou

Eastern Communication Association Convention
Syracuse, N.Y., 1987

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INTRODUCTION

"You know," said the director of Marketing, "there is exploitation everywhere. The best you can do is to pick the area you want to be exploited in." This comment was expressed not as a reaction to an accusation of exploitation but arose in the course of an informal talk about the days when I had been employed by the company. I remember thinking, this being the third day of my research, that the speaker must have felt guilty, defensive, or at least slightly self-conscious to warrant such a statement. I also remember thinking that a belief in this statement could justify just about anything.

The company spoken of was one used as a research model for this paper. Katz Communications, Inc. is a large media representation firm in Manhattan. The company represents several television station clients thoughout the country by selling their air time to advertisers. I was once employed by the company as a sales assistant, a position which was and continues to be solely occupied by females. I left the position to attend graduate school and subsequently returned as an independent researcher under the auspices of the chairman of the board. My goal was to articulate those aspects of the culture which, although I found troublesome as an organizational member, were extremely difficult at that time to put into words. This paper is written in a way which attempts to integrate roles of both actor and researcher.

I spent three months with one sales team. Ten weeks were devoted to observing and recording communication as it occurred in the normal flow of work. At the end of the observation stage, I organized my notes under main themes. If an event occurred several times, it headed an index card under which particular incidents were listed.

The second stage of research consisted of interviewing every member of the Silver sales team and the chairman. Prior to the interviews, I drew up several lists of questions. One list for the sales representatives, one for the sales assistants, one for management, and one for the chairman. The interviews were conducted after I spent a substantial amount of time with the Silver team and each interview lasted about one hour. I did not take notes during the interview but instead recorded the entire interview, with the full permission of the interviewees, which I later transcribed.

The style in which this paper is interpretative and the methodology is purely qualitative. Support for this approach is widespread within the literature[1] and the one which made the most sense for this particular study.

I begin my discussion with the three guideposts with which I began my research. This discussion then leads to the development of theoretical foundations and a research focus. This format best reflects the evolutionary process of method. This process was both an advantage and a constraint. It was an advantage because the method developed sprung, more like crawled, from the data; it was a constraint because of the arduous task of developing a method piecemeal. Each step in the process brought me closer toward interpreting the data. The two levels of data consist of the communication of the company officials and, the bulk of the data, the communication of the sales assistants.

Theoretical Perspective

I began my research into Organizational Culture with three definitions. One definition was borrowed from Cultural Anthropology, another from the field of Speech Communication, and yet another from current business literature. They are

respectively as follows: Culture, as defined by Clifford Geertz, as an enacted document.[2] Organizations, as defined by O'Donnell-Trujillo and Pacanowsky as social realities, constituted and articulated in organizational sense-making. Their list of cultural indicators for the analysis of organizational sense-making includes: relevant constructs, facts, practices, vocabulary, metaphors, stories, rites and rituals.[3] Organizational Culture, as it is defined in current business literature, as "a system of shared values (what is important) and beliefs (how things work) that interact with a company's people, organizational structures and control systems to produce behavioral norms (the way things are done around here)".[4]

None of the definitions were particularly useful in and of themselves. That which I most needed, before I could begin to analyze the data, was a theoretical understanding. My next step was to ground the three definitions within a theoretical perspective. Doing so, not only provided a more solid foundation from which to work, it also provided a central focus for my analysis. An adequate theoretical framework emerges from blurring the line between them and results in a building block approach to the subject matter. Each theory serves as support and picks up where the other leaves off.

It made more sense to, instead of beginning with a particular disciplines orientation such as Cultural Anthropology, to return to the etymology and the original context of the word itself. Hannah Arendt tells us that "Culture, word and concept, is Roman in origin. The word 'culture' derives from colere - to cultivate, to dwell, to take care, to tend and preserve -- and it relates primarily to the intercourse of man with nature in the sense of cultivating and tending nature until it becomes fit for human habitation."[5] The modern usage of the word culture rarely incorporates this agricultural notion of tending, caring, or dwelling.

The reason, states Arendt, has less to do with the fact that we no longer live within a predominately agrian society and more to do with the extent in which our attitudes on this topic are shaped by the ancient Greeks. The Greeks regarded culture as fabrication and in need of controlling. That is, for the Greeks, culture was governed by cunning, skillful, and technical devices.[6] The Romans, therefore, regarded culture as that which was given or natural. The Greeks, on the other hand, regarded culture as that which was created or fabricated. Placed within this context, Geertz's definition of culture as an enacted document is understood as something not entirely natural nor entirely created but a combination of the two.

Differeing attitudes toward man-made objects and products of nature lay at the heart of the dichotomy. This cultural dichotomy manifests itself in two ways today. One, there is a tendency for cultural members to forget that their culture was once created. The cultural environment is so much a part of the taken-for-granted, everyday existence that is seems natural. There is the inclination to perceive surrounding cultural elements as products of nature. This perspective often fosters an impervious attitude; the cultural members frequently feel that he/she cannot in any way change the existing culture. Two, the Roman influence is still felt and is seen in the zealous manner in which fabrications are preserved. That is, cultural members work very hard to preserve their creations while simultaneously forgetting that they are creations.

Research Question

The research question emerges from this focus: How is the sense of the social world as a natural order produced by the organizational members of the Silver sales team at Katz Communications, Inc.? I am most interested in understanding how the

organizational members foster an impression that the social environment is not a product or their own making but is rather a natural phenomenon.

One way in which the confusion between the natural and the created is produced is through organizational facts. Social or organizational facts are statements which seem to be direct reflections of reality instead of man-made creations. Discovering that which serves as fact within the organization is a way of uncovering the taken-for-granted aspects of organizational reality. All organizational facts share the following four features: they are man-made, public, subject to change, and discursive.[7]

My data warrants that sexism has achieved the status of fact within the Katz culture. This paper examines the ways in which sexism as an organizational fact is manifested within the sales team community. The issue of sexism at Katz is centrally tied to those females in the position of sales assistant. As was before mentioned, all of the sales assistants are females and my research findings conclude that the position of sales assistant is perceived by the Katz organizational members as gender specific. Here, sexism is defined as a set of assumptions regarding a group of individuals which are based upon a gender-related role.[8] My aim within this analysis is to discover the ways in which sexism is built into the organizational structure, how sexism achieves the status of fact, and the ways in which the organizational members maintain the existence of this fact as part of the social order. Sexism exists within the entire organizational structure and may be perceived as a practical accomplishment on the part of the organizational members.[9]

Method

Company Officials

An etymological understanding of culture was extremely useful in creating a theoretical perspective. I still needed, however, to move toward creating a system of analysis for interpreting the data. Roland Barthes' concept of myth moved me slightly closer. Myth, according to Barthes, occurs when that which is created is treated and experienced as if it were natural.[10] Barthes' theory serves as a nexus for the conflicting attitudes concerning culture and also provided a list of rhetorical tropes particular to myth. This list of tropes, which includes statement of fact, the privation of history, neither-norism, the quantification of quality, and identification,[11] allowed me to conduct the first stage of my analysis by isolating key features of the culture embedded in the language of company officials.

Statement of fact

Barthes states that he who uses this trope "invests in this figure interests which are bound to its very essence: universalism, the refusal of any explanation, an unalterable hierarchy of the world."[12] The classic form of this figure is the maxim. The entire corporate culture at Katz is based upon the maxim "Katz the best." "Here," Barthes states, "the statement is no longer directed toward a world to be made; it must overlay one which is already made, bury the traces of production under a self-evident appearance of eternity: it is counter-explanation, the decorous equivalent of a tautology, of this peremptory <u>because</u> which parents in need of knowledge hang above the heads of their children."[13] When I asked both the chairman and the general sales manager what the maxim "Katz the best" meant, I was told "It means exactly what it says" and when I pressed further, "Because it is" was the reply. The sales assistants also frequently used this figure. When asked why the company was the best or why the sales assistants were exclusively female, the

response was always the same "Because that's the way it is."

Privation of History

Of this figure, Barthes states "Nothing is produced, nothing is chosen: all one has to do is to possess these new objects from which all soiling trace of origin or choice has been removed. This miraculous evaporation of history . . ."[14] Talking to the general sales manager, I asked if it was company policy not to hire males for the position of sales assistant. "Oh no," he replied, "it can't be a matter of policy. It just happened." No one created this situation, so therefore no one need take reponsibility for it.

Neither-Norism

"By this I mean this mythological figure which consists in stating two opposites and balancing the one by the other so as to reject them both (I want neither this nor that)."[15] The application of this trope means that "one no longer needs to choose, but only to endorse."[16] "You know," said the general sales manager, "these girls (the sales assistants) are not secretaries. It would be a luxury if they had secretarial skills." This statement places the sales assistant in an ambiguous position. The use of this figure does not press the individual to choose between defining this group as either sales assistant or secretary, only to endorse the state of ambiguity.

Quantification of quality

"By reducing any quality to quantity myth economizes intelligence: it understands reality more cheaply."[17] Barthes provides the bourgeois theatre to serve as an example: "On the one hand, theatre is presented as an essence which cannot be

reduced to any languarge and reveals itself only to the heart, to intuition. On the other hand, bourgeois dramatic art rests on the pure quantification of effects: a whole circuit of computable appearances establishes a qualitative equality between the cost of the ticket and the tears of the actor or the luxuriousness of the set."[18] The corporation, like the theatre, also rests upon the quantification of effects. Within the corporation, the worth of the individual is usually directly proportional to the salary he/she receives. Katz has the additional feature of a commission plan. Those who exceed their production quota draw a commission. There is a contradiction between the sales assistants' worth and their financial compensation. Everyone on the sales team spoke of the importance of the sales assistants' job. I was told by the majority of the team members that the company would cease to function without the sales assistant. Yet, this expressed worth is not translated into any corporate indications of value. As one sales assistant put it, "Yes, I think the job of sales assistant is very important" and then added, "but really, how important could it be?" The sales assistants do not work on a commission basis. It is up to the discretion of the sales representative to decide whether he wants the sales assistant to share in the commission. When it is shared, it is usually in the form of a gift. A gift, within the corporate structure, keeps the receiver dependent on the gift-giver. Gift-giving is determined by the individual's discretion and generosity. Furthermore, a gift need not be earned. A commission system, on the other hand, is a straightforward matter of company policy. It is a systematic reward procedure which recognizes individual achievement.

Identification

This trope, states Barthes, occurs when "any otherness is reduced to sameness."[19] There seems to be, within the culture, features of the sales assistants' job which make it immediately identifiable with females. Ones sales assistant told me that it would seem odd if there were male sales assistants, "Everyone would look at him . . . I always think that males should try to better themselves as much as they can." An additional level on which this trope manifests itself is through the assumption that because the group is exclusively female, they are all the same. One personal exchange serves to reinforce the identification, "It must have been hard for you to have been a sales assistant," commented the director of marketing. When I asked why he thought so, he replied, "Well, because you are so unlike them."

The female sales assistant is placed within an identification pattern which is very difficult to break. From the first encounter with personnel, it seems that being young and female immediately identifies her with the position of sales assistant. Once an employee, the title of sales assistant serves to identify her as having particular personality traits unique to the group. The identification pattern serves to keep the sales assistant within the position of sales assistant.

Method

The Sales Assistants

An organizational culture is not solely the product of company officials but is a practical accomplishment on the part of all the organizational members. The second stage of my research consisted of building upon the theoretical perspective and at the same time moving more toward a method for interpreting and organizing the accounts of the sales assistants. Kenneth Leiter and his work on ethnomethodology served this function. Ethnomethodology's interest lies in the construction of a social reality through language use.[20] The ehtnomethodological view is that

social realities are created by the interaction of the stock of knowledge at hand, the natural attitude toward everyday life, and the practices of common sense reasoning.[21]

That which was most problematic in conducting organizational culture research was the clarity and similarity of dissimilar terms. The stock of knowledge at hand includes the idealizations (typifications) and formulations (rules) of a culture.[22] "Typifications are categories, categories of people, events, and objects. Social types, motives, attitudes, behaviors, and even vocabularies are cultural typifications constructed by organizational members."[23] Typifications and formulations each share a reference to that which is standardized or thematized. In fact, Pacanowsky and O'Donnel-Trujillo list of cultural indicators as well as the three terms (values, beliefs, and norms) provided earlier in this paper each share a similar reference. Typification, formulation, myth, rhetorical trope, rite, ritual, vocabulary, value, belief, and norm all imply something which is standard, patterned, and formal. Although cultures differ from organization to organization, and even within organizations, this list consists of preconstituted types within the culture.

The natural attitude toward everyday life, or the facticity of the social world, has already been discussed at length since it provides the focus for this paper. Barthes refers to the natural attitude toward everyday life as myth.[24] Both speak of an acceptance of the social world as a factual object.[25] The stock of knowledge at hand combined with the practices of common sense reasoning are the methods for turning personal experience into an objective reality.[26] The difference between the stock of knowledge at hand and the practices of common sense reasoning is drawn

from the differences between language and speaking.[27] Language, or the stock of knowledge at hand, forms a cultural code. This code, however, is created and manifested through the accounting practices, the speech, of the organizational members. Speaking, or the accounting practices, provide the dual function of being both the vehicle for the presentation of the social world and also responsible for the construction of the social world itself.[28]

To reiterate, this papaer investigates how a group of organizational members sustain a particular sense of the social structure or order. Organizational members accomplish this by producing a regular patterned social order (the stock of knowledge at hand), a sense that this order is independent of individual perception (the natural attitude toward everyday life), and a set of methods for observing and reporting the qualitites of the social world (the practices of common sense reasoning). To return to the business definition of organizational culture, the terms of values, beliefs, and norms closely parallel those terms used within ethnomethodology. Like the stock of knowledge at hand, values are created principles, standards, or qualities. Belief, like the natural attitude toward everyday life, describes an attitudinal stance toward the social world. Lastly, norms are analogous to the accounting practices of the organizational members. Practices are the methods of interpretation used to observe and report events within the culture and through observing and reporting, the organizational members create and sustain the factual character of the social world.

The understanding of typifications was extremely helpful in unraveling the organizational culture. Kenneth Leiter in A Primer on Ethnomethodology stresses the pragmatic function of typifications, "These labels are created to recognize types of people and behaviors deemed important to the functioning of the group."[28]

Furthermore, "these idealizations form a kind of prejudice toward the social world as a particular kind of world or reality."[29]

From my observations and interviews, I listed eleven typifications within the culture. The list included: social types, females culture, rite of passage, communication style, vernacular, metaphor, knowledge, status, power, and promotion. Upon looking at each, some shared similar characteristics and could, therefore, be grouped together. Social types and female culture, for instance, share a reference to role. Also in terms of the hierarchical order, some were more essential than others. Typifications concerning role, for instance, is the most essential ingredient wihtin the culture. Without this typification securely locked in place, the culture would cease to function as it does currently. My final analysis consists of the most noteworthy typifications: roles - social types and females culture; rites - rites of passage; recognition - knowledge, status, power, promotion.

Typifications

Roles

The most central typification within the culture is that of social types. Two essential social types within the culture are those of the sales assistant and the buyer. The interrelatedness of these two social types is extremely functional for the company.

The sales assistant

The label of sales assistant serves as a typification for a group of people, their behaviors, and reasons for behaving. The qualities which are essentially linked to the title of sales assistant are that the individual is female, immature,

and young. Each quality serves to define the other. These women are sales assistants because they are female and they are immature because they are young. Two comments provided by the general manager serve to illustrate this point. After I interviewed him, he asked me whom I had interviewed prior to him. He wondered aloud what the team members had said about him in the course of the interviews. We talked generally about intended actions and interpretations. "Well," he said, "they (the sales assistants) are very young and that's great. I would hope that they have more going on in their lives than this job. Many of them see me as a father figure." Also in the course of this interview, he described how he perceived the sales assistants. When asked about the assumptions he held of people in general and employees in particular, he responded "I think I expect them (the sales assistants) to understand that this is a business and not a finishing school, that we are not psychiatrists. People have lots of problems but this is not the place to get professional assistance to solve them. You don't have to love everybody, you just have to get along with them . . . to get the job done and you have to, I expect them to, respect one another . . . at least on a superficial level so that there isn't a morale factor that gets in the way of the unit of people functioning as an entity, as a team, because you have to have that."

It is important to note that a basic tenet of ethnomethodology is that behavior is indexical.[30] That is, in this case, behavior which gets its immature status from being interpreted as such rather than being inherently immature. The social typification of the sales assistant forms a scheme of interpretation and the interpretative procedures produce the factual character of the sales assistants' qualitites. Everyone within the organization works at accomplishing the social

order or, put in a slightly different way, the facticity of the qualities of the sales assistant is a social accomplishment.

The typification of the sales assistant as immature creates a group of individuals within the organization who are not promotable. This action is one from which the company benefits. In creating such a group, the company creates workers whom they need not pay a higher salary, train for higher positions, or provide with stock options.

The buyers

The sales assistants most frequently in the course of their day have to interact with buyers from advertising agencies. The buyers are also an exclusively female group and their interaction is solely via the telephone. As the sales assistant is typified within the culture, so is the buyer. She is typified as rude and the motives associated with her behavior is that she is under a great deal of pressure.

The typification of the buyer as rude also insures that the corporation continues to run smoothly. The buyers' ill-treatment of the sales assistant is considered a given within the culture. The sales assistant knows, therefore, that she is not to interpret the buyers' behavior as a personal assault. If there is little or no personal involvement, the sales assistant quickly learns to psychologically remove herself from the situation. The outcome of this activity provides three potential functions for the company.

One, the structure promotes an accepting stance on the part of the sales assistant. The manner in which the sales assistant is treated by the buyer is considered a part of the job, so adopting a stance other than an accepting one is considered inappropriate. Two, it provides the sales assistant with the lesson of

the impersonality of business. This is, for most of sales assistants, their first job out of college and the company instills the notion that how one is treated in business has little or nothing to do with them personally. The promotion of an accepting and impersonal attitude on the part of the sales assistant serves the company in that it makes the acquiescence of the social typification of the sales assistant more likely. Promoting the message that the buyers' behavior has little or nothing to do with the sales assistant, makes it easier to promote the message that the social typification of the sales assistant also has little or nothing to do with the individual sales assistant. The sales assistant acquires the social typification simply by becoming a member of the sales assistant group. Three, the social typification of the buyer as rude assures that the company will not have to perform the function of mediator between the buyer and the sales assistant. The company does not have to divest time, energy, and money from business to mend the hurt feelings of the sales assistant. Because the buyers' behavior is considered a given within the culture, the sales assistant rarely becomes outwardly upset because of the way she is treated. If she becomes inwardly upset, she is left to deal with her own feelings.

Female culture

One way in which the role typifications are accomplished is through the construction of a female culture. The sales assistants inhabit a subculture within the larger corporate culture. A reading of the literature concerning male and female culture reveals that the main issues of contention are: do differences exist, are the cultures natural or created, and is an adherence to a prescribed

role a sign of weakness or strength.[31] Most writers on the topic agree that female culture is often characterized by an emphasis on relationships, interdependence, and care.[32] Male culture, on the other hand, is frequently characterized by an emphasis on competition, independence, and work.[33]

My finding concludes that the genders behaved in ways consistent with these generalizations, that gender roles are socially created, and an adherence to these roles alludes to the pervasiveness of gender assumptions as fact in theory and practice.

Hennig and Jardim found, in the course of their research for The Managerial Woman, that females often establish personal liking as a prerequisite for a task-related relationship.[34] Whether or not someone is liked at Katz is a major factor in the female culture. This, it was often expressed, was a stipulation in being able to work with various individuals. This attitude was decidedly different from that expressed by management. The general manager's account on this topic was that he expected the sales assistants to get along "at least on a superficial level". For the sales assistants, however, there was no such appearance of cordiality without genuine feeling. In speaking with one sales assistant, she commented that she would not be able to work for many of the sales representatives because, in her words, "I don't like all that many of them." There was no sense of suspending likability for the sake of getting the job done within the female subculture.

Hennig and Jardim also state that if a woman assumes without thinking that the quality of relationships is her most important priority and acts on it, she tends not to have tangible career objective.[35] The female culture at Katz has a different priority system than the corporate culture. When I asked one sales

assistant what she would most like to see changed at the company, she responded, "I'm satisfied. The company's great. Maybe if they paid a little more money though, people would stick around longer. I'm sure a lot of people who leave are happy with what they are doing and are happy with the people they work with because the people at Katz are great." She presents money as a way to keep the sales assistants together. In addition to an emphasis on relationships, there is an element of passivity present within the sales assistants' accounts on the topic of career objectives. When asked of goals and career plans, one stated "When I'm in the mood, I suppose I'll go look for something else." And when I asked another if she would like to become a sales representative, she replied, "If it happens, it happens" but she was not going to actively pursue it.

In Carol Gilligan's analysis of the moral decision of females in In a Different Voice, she found that the desire not to hurt others was the strongest motivational force. One sales assistant explained how this was a central factor in her behavior, "I don't want to say the wrong thing. For me to say the wrong thing, I'd rather stay shut. I don't like hurting people's feelings. I don't like saying anything that would offend them in any way. I either stay shut or am very careful about the words I use."

The female subculture serves to double-bind[37] the sales assistant. It is set up as a social environment where the sales assistants are neither expected nor required to act professionally (i.e., like the members of corporate culture). The style within the female subculture is more casual than the corporate culture. Many of the sales assistants are attracted to the position because they are permitted to dress and act casually. As adaptation to the female subculture serves to double-bind on several levels. To become a member of the female subculture serves to

confirm the typification that she is immature, and therefore, non-promotable. To be perceived as possessing the qualities which the corporate culture would recognize as mature and business-like, the sales assistant would need to go against the female subculture. More to the point, she would have to appease the female subculture while striving to become a member of the corporate culture. In other words, she would have to become an exception female.[34] For the sales assistant who does distinguish herself as an exception female, her direct path still does not lead to beoming a sales representative for the company. In order to aspire to the position of sales representative, the sales assistant needs to leave the company, rid herself of the typification of sales assistant, and re-enter the organization with a new image. "Go away and get some status" is how the sales assistants refer to the process.

Rites

According to the philosopher Ernest Cassirer, the two essential features of rites are their temporal and spacial dimensions. Of time: "a conspicuous trait of nature, a striking characteristic of a thing or species, is held to be 'explained' as soon as it is linked with a unique event in the past, which discloses its mythical generation."[38] And of space: "Wherever mythical thinking and mythical feeling endow a content with a particular value, wherever they distinguish it from others and lend it a special significance, this qualitative distinction tends to be represented in the image of spacial separation."[39] Rites are further germane to this inquiry because they play a major role in preserving the social order or as Suzanne Langer states, they produce right attitudes.[40] "A rite regularly performed is the constant reiteration of sentiments toward 'first and last things'; it is

not a free expression of emotions, but a disciplined rehersal of right attitudes."[41]

Rites of passage

I observed two rites of passage on the part of the sales assistants. "Floating", the training period for the sales assistant, contains a spacial dimension. Standing up to the buyer, on the other hand, has a temporal feature.

Floating

The sales assistants' language concerning the topic of floating reflects an initiation into the female subculture. During the interviews, the sales assistants told me that floating is the dues one pays for membership. "Getting a desk", becoming a sales assistant, is perceived as a sign of independence. One sales assistant described the initiation this way, "One sales assistant had it out for me - maybe because I talked back to her. She would say that I did this, this, and this wrong and I would say OK, but let me explain why I did it. She didn't want to hear that. She says what is on her mind and that's good but I'm like that too." I asked if she spoke to anyone about this, "No, I didn't have a sales rep. and I didn't want to start complaining . . . being a little baby. Because that's what it is in business - personality problems work out. Once I got my desk, she didn't bother me any more. I had my own thing to do; I had a home."

The term "floater" provides a clue to the central organizational fact. A floater is a sales assistant who has not yet been assigned to work for one sales representative, she therefore "floats" to wherever she is needed. The label "floater" accurately describes how the sales assistant trainee is perceived within the organization. In an environment where the sales assistant is very much defined by whom she works for, the "floater" lacks an identity.

Standing up to the buyer

The sales assistants have constructed a rite of passage concerning their interactions with the buyers. The act of yelling at the sales assistant is perceived as a taken-for-granted aspect of the culture and a necessary part of the job. It is important, according to the sales assistants, not to become intimidated by the buyer under any circumstances.

The sales assistants believe that the preferred way to circumvent the buyers' rudeness is to maintain that the sales assistant performed her job correctly. The sales assistants' perceive this rite as the only way to establish credibility in the buyers' eyes. Some sales assistants boast of buyers who trust them completely; they feel that the buyers perceive tham as competent and knowledgeable. Before, however, the sales assistant achieves this status of competency, she must accomplish the rite of passage which marks her movement from incompetency to competency. How the sales assistant performs within this test, determines whether or not she ever achieves the status of competency.

Through the eyes of the sales assistant, the rite of standing up to the buyer is an accomplishment on several levels. One, the process makes the sales assistant strong. One sales assistant speaks of the buyer "who made me as tough as I am today". Two, it establishes the autonomy of the sales assistant. She is then percieved as competent by the buyer and capable of working on her own. "I have buyers," the sales assistants boast, "that when I call with a make-good, they ask if it is STP (same time period) and if it is, they say fine." Third, the sales assistants perceive themselves as superior to the buyers because they are not given to such outbreaks of anger. I overheard one sales assistant telling another that she asked one of her buyers "Why aren't you screeming?" and then added, "My, we have matured."

Recognition

Knowledge

The sales assistants learn a specialized form of task knowledge. Included within this category are the various stages of an order beginning with appropriately writing an order as it is given over the telephone and ending with making sure the buyers receive contracts which log the individual advertising spots ordered. In between these stages, she is in constant communication with the television station via the TWX machine and telephone, and with the buyer via the telephone.

The male sales representative typically does not know how to accomplish the tasks for which the sales assistant is responsible. The sales assistants would like the sales representatives to learn some of their tasks, but not all. One sales assistant, for instance, told me how they shaped the behavior of a sales representative, "This happens to be a very good team and pretty much everyone works for one another. We have given some shit to some of the salesmen which has gotton them a little bit on the ball, those who didn't take their own orders for instance. There is no reason why a salesman shouldn't know how to take his own orders."

There is, however, another area of task knowledge which the sales assistants do not want men to learn, operating the TWX machine. A man operating a TWX machine is not a common occurrence within the company. There are a few reasons for this: One, TWXing, because it is part of the sales assistants' job, is viewed as female work. Two, there is no motivation within the company for the male sales representative to learn this task. There is no importance placed on this task within the corporate value system, there is no money, prestige or status associated with TWXing. Three, the sales assistants play a part in preventing the men from learning how to use the machine. An account which illustrated this final point was as follows:

Two sales assistants and Gene, a sales representative, were gathered in the hall talking. The sales assistant related a story about a male sales representative who asked her to teach him how to operate the TWX machine. She spoke of the incident very disparagingly, "OK," she said slowly, "Now press the orange button, now pick up the phone . . ." The group laughed. This knowledge is not valued within the corporate culture, yet is given a certain amount of prestige with the female culture. In the telling of this story, there was an element of superiority displayed on the part of the sales assistant. The male sales representative was portrayed as slightly incompetent because he was unfamiliar with their area of knowledge.

Status

Like operating the TWX machine, many of the cultural elements which are not valued by the larger corporate culture are usurped by the sales assistants and made their own. The female culture creates its own symbols and prestige. They speak in a way that gives value to what they do. In talking with me, their comments about the worth of the sales assistant were almost always followed by an acknowledgement that the remainder of the organization does not perceive them in the same way. "I really believe that the sales assistants hold together the sales unit," one sales assistant told me. She laughed and continued, "But I don't know if anybody else thinks so." Another expressed a similar statement when I asked how she thought her boss thinks of the job of sales assistant, "I wonder sometimes what he thinks of the job of sales assistant. Sometimes I think he gets the impression that it is important, other times I get the impression that he thinks it is unimportant. But really, how important can it be?"

When I asked her if she thought that the company respected the position of sales assistant, she answered "I don't know. I think so. I'm not sure. Sometimes I feel positive and other times I feel that when I say I'm a sales assistant, what are they going to think?"

Power

An example of how the sales assistants attempt to exert power and achieve change emerged from one sales assistant's account of being passed over for a raise. I asked her what was the worst thing that had happened to her at Katz and she responded, "I don't know. I guess nothing has ever been denied me. I guess the worst thing that ever happened was when I was up for a promotion and I did not get it until I fought for it fiercely. I asked why she did not receive the raise. "Bureaucratic bullshit!" she responded. "But I fought and I ended up getting it." she added. "Who did you go to in order to get the decision turned around?" I asked. "I went to Marty. I would have gone to Len (Marty's superior) but Marty stopped me from going to Len. I had it coming to me. It was wrong for them to deny it and I wasn't going to shut up until I got it." She ended this statement with a laugh. I asked if she would have approached the two men differently. "I was able to scream at Marty," she told me. "I wouldn't scream at Lenny. I'm friendly with him but if it came to business, it would be irrational to go in there and start screaming at him. Marty I could scream at because he would say 'Shut up'." Her account reveals that it would be inappropriate to behave in a way which would be perceived as irrational with Len, but to behave this way with Mary is appropriate because he is a team member. Both men are part of management at Katz but interaction with Len requires more professional behavior because he is not a team member.

What the sales assistants fail to realize is that it is as important, if not more important, not to display the cultural typifications of sales assistants in their interactions with team members. The sales assistant, lulled by the informality of the team structure, behaves in a way which she deems inappropriate within other settings. The sales assistants behavior reinforces the typification that she is immature and unbusinesslike. Their behavior signifies that they do not possess the necessary qualitites for career advancement.

Promotion

The sales assistants spoke bitterly about the bill of goods that they were sold when they were interviewed for the job at Katz. I asked one sales assistant if she was told, when interviewed, that in order to advance her career she would have to leave Katz, "go away and get some status" as she put it. "I wasn't told this when I was interviewed. I assumed that I was getting into a nice, reputable firm with a chance to grow. 'I am not sure what my career goals are yet,'" she said she told the woman in personnel, "'but I'd like to grow with the firm, blah, blah, blah,' ' Oh yes this is the place,'" she mimicked the personnel representative. "So I bullshitted, she bullshitted and then I started working as a sales assistant." She laughed and said "There is no such thing here." I asked Bonnie if she just assumed what kind of company she was getting into or if she verbalized these assumptions. "I expressed it," she replied, "I knew what was going on. I knew what to say and they confirmed it. Maybe they just liked my line or something, I don't know." The sales assistants do not, however, attempt to express their disapproval to a corporate representative and consequently, the existing order has less of a potential for change.

The sales assistants speak of the typifications of the sales assistant that prevent them from getting promoted. One sales assistant spoke poignantly about this issue, "It's a waste of talent. It's a shame. I don't think they perceive us as having the potential, having the ability, whatever that requires. I don't think they check into that. They assume that we are all young girls, early twenties is the oldest, who are single and just want a cheap, low-paying job to start getting New York City experience. That's all. I don't think they realize that some of us are serious and want to have a career so they do not even look to pick from here to move up." I then asked if she thought that the company made decisions about the abilities of the sales assistants based on their set of stereotypical assumptions held toward the sales assistants. "It's a self-fulfilling prophecy," I was told. "If more [sales assistants] came in and there was an opportunity to move up, they would be very happy. I think it's more myth than fact. They [the sales assistants] get restless because they know there is nothing for them here. If there is no opening in research or whatever and obviously they are not going to pursue it because they know they can't. It's a vicious cycle. If they [the sales assistants] were given a chance . . . maybe if the company started a training program and tried it out for a summer, I think they would be very surprised. They have plenty of resources; people would really take an interest."

She is correct in her assessment that the situation at Katz is a self-fulfilling prophecy, a vicious cycle and more myth than fact. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy because the typification of the sales assistant as immature and non-professional may in fact play a part in causing behavior which is deemed immature and non-professional. The sales assistant joins the organization under the assumption,

whether confirmed or not, that there is room for promotion within the organization. Once hired, however, she learns that opportunities for career advancement are at best slim and at worst non-existent. It is not improbable to assume that this knowledge, which the sales assistant acquires once she is an employee, would affect her behavior. It is not farfetched to assume that individuals who do not foresee a future career with the company would behave in a way characterized as non-professional by the organization. If a potential to develop a career is unlikely, it is understandable that the sales assistant would place a complete emphasis on the maintenance of relationships. The account reveals that the result is a vicious cycle; the words are telling since the end result of this situation is that the sales assistants' behavior serves to confirm, reinforce, and maintain the existing typifications of the sales assistant. Lastly, this situation is more myth than fact because these are created qualities; the qualities of immaturity and non-professionalism are created and not inherently found within the sales assistant.

CONCLUSION

I began this paper with three definitions borrowed from the disciplines of Cultural Anthropology, Speech Communication, and Business. Each perspective, while adding a separate dimension to the study, have many commonalities and work together well in building a methodological system. Each definition speaks, in some way, of a social reality. A social reality, as contrasted to an actual or physical reality, is the world of appearances and/or impressions. Owen Barfield, in Saving the Appearances, contrasts the two:

> Physical science has for a long time stressed the enormous difference between what it investigates as the actual structure of the universe, including the earth, and the appearances, which are presented by that structure to normal human consciousness.[42]

Human beings participate in the creation of a social reality through their communication. This study has been an investigation into how one sales team within an organization accomplishes this task. More to the point, I selected to focus on how the organizational members have forgotten the active role they play in the creation of their social reality; they treat their social reality as if it were a product of nature rather than a human construction. Within the literature, Barthes refers to this process as myth.[43]

> Myth essentially aims at causing an immediate impression - it does not matter if one is later allowed to see through the myth, its action is assumed to be stronger than the rational explanations which later belie it.[44]

The ethnomethodologist, on the other hand, refers to this stance as the natural attitude toward everyday life.[45] The word typification, in fact, which occupies a central role within the ethnomethodology literature and this paper, derives from tupos meaning impression.[46] Regardless of terms, both speak of an acceptance of the social world as factual object; the social world as fact is taken for granted.[47]

The supporting theorists share still more in common. Arendt, Barthes, and Leiter each speak of the trilogistic structure of form, content and process. Although the labels often differ, the meanings remain the same. The study of

culture essentially concerns the interrelationship between form, content, and process. Arendt labels the three phenomena display, presentation, and representation.[48] She equates displays with appearances and representations with what one thinks about the appearances. That which mediates the two are presentations or speaking. Speaking, therefore, bridges the gulf between the world of appearances or that which is natural or given and the representations or that which is created or fabricated.[49] Barthes refers to this trilogy as the signified or concept, the signifier or the mental image, and the sign, which is the relationship between the concept and the image, or the word.[50] The ethnomethodological system offered by Kenneth Leiter includes the stock of knowledge at hand, the practices of common sense reasoning, and the natural attitude toward everyday life.[51] The meanings of these three systems are analogous. Display, the signified, and the stock of knowledge at hand share a reference to form, that which things essentially are. Presentation, the sign, and the practices of common sense reasoning are analogous to content, that which is presented. Representation, the signifier, and the natural attitude toward everyday life all refer to the thinking process.

Culture is the end product of the interrelationship of these three phenomena. Geertz effectively describes this cryptic quality by defining culture as an acted document, "Though ideational, it does not exist in someone's head; though unphysical, it is not an occult entity."[52]

The methodological perspective was built in the following way: Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo provided the cutural <u>form</u> of organizational fact. Kenneth Leiter provided an understanding of the <u>process</u> of facticy or the organizational members' predisposition to treat the social world as natural fact. The Silver sales team at Katz provided the specific <u>content</u>, sexism, of the form and process.

It was stated that the typifications operating within the culture serve to double bind the sales assistants and serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy.[53] Each typification serves to reinforce the social type of the sales assistant as immature. This reinforcement is a constant confirmation that the social typification is true. If the sales assistants behave in ways consistent with the typification, there is no need for promotion, a training program, nor, most significantly a need to change the existing social order.

In her article on women and morality, Lorraine B. Code asserts that in the realm of human interaction, the way something is known can significantly change the phenomenon under consideration. "As William James puts it," states Code, "faith in a fact can help create the fact."[54] Code stresses the communal quality of facts, "the epistemic 'location' of knowers and would-be knowers, in a time, a place, a culture, and a language, imposes constraints upon the form and the content of knowledge."[55] The author draws upon the human power to create facts within a community to illustrate the female condition:

> When women are persistently treated and depicted as feather-brained, incapable of dealing with certain kinds of situations or materials, it is extremely difficult for them to exercise the kind of intellectual virture manifested in a just perception of the difficulties of a particular subject relative to their capacities to deal with it. Persistent faith, throughout the epistemic community, in their inability tends to confirm them in their suspicion that they are incapable, to the point where it almost comes to be true.[56]

Code's statement on women confirms the findings of this study. For the sales assistants at Katz, the creation of the social typifications serve to keep the sales assistant within the role of sales assistant. The ability of the organizational member to treat what is created as natural phenomenon makes these typifications compelling.

The study of the organizational culture of the Silver sales team at Katz concludes that there is not one culture but two, the corporate culture and the female subculture of the sales assistants. In their work on the family as a system, Pragmatics of Human Communication, Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson employ a term which adequately describes the relationship between the two cultures. The term is homeostasis and it is defined as the maintenance of a steady state of stability or equilibrium.[57] Those within the state of homeostasis are characterized by their complementary nature[58] or when the two cultures provide the impression of mirror images.

Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson use communication as a determinant of homeostasis. In system theory language, they characterize communication as positive or negative feedback. Positive feedback moves away from the norm and brings about a loss in stability or equilibrium.[59] Negative feedback, on the other hand, does not deviate from the set norm or bias and therefore plays a major role in achieving or maintaining stability or the status quo.[60] Concerning the accounts of the sales assistants, examples of positive feedback were accounts which spoke of the unfairness of the present system, the failure to be recognized as intelligent individuals, and the lack of promotional opportunities. Each of these accounts exemplifies positive feedback, and amplifies the deviation from the norm. There are, however, far more examples of negative feedback displayed in the sales assistants' accounts. Examples of negative feedback accounts are the sales assistants' reaction to and judgment of the male who wanted to learn how to operate the TWX machine, the manner in which the sales assistants wield, or attempt to wield, power and the discouragement of individual assertiveness within the female subculture. These accounts are representative of negative feedback, feedback in

which input into the system is counteracted to maintain stability. The result of the examples of negative feedback that out-number and out-weigh examples of positive feedback is that the stability is accomplished and the status quo maintained.

The complementary nature of the female subculture and the corporate culture is a key to how the sense of the natural order is preserved by the organizational members. Geertz states that man is a symbolizing, conceptualizing, meaning-seeking animal and the drive to make sense out of experience, to give it form and order, is evidently as real and as pressing as the more familiar biological needs.[61] In order for the female sales assistants to give their experiences form and order, they must be consistent with and fit into the greater scheme of the corporate culture. The complementary feature of the two cultures and the cultural forms accomplish at least two purposes. One, the complementary nature provides the organizational members with a sense of continuity, balance, and completeness. As much as the sales assistants speak of their dissatisfaction with the existing social order, they work to preserve it. Two, the complementary nature of the two cultures provides the sales assistants with a domain, a set of activities within that domain, as their own. For instance, the activity of operating the TWX machine is given prestige within the female subculture. The relatively simple activity speaks to a number of very important issues. One, it addresses the sales assistant's need to bring a certain amount of prestige to what they do. Shut out of the corporate value system, the sales assistants create their own. In order for this task to be accomplished, the status-bearing object within the female subculture must be complementary to those found within the corporate culture. Two, the status-bearing objects belong within the domain of the female subculture in the

first place, because the corporate culture has placed it there. The corporate culture has discarded the activity of operating the TWX machine because it is perceived as non-prestigious or more likely, it is perceived as non-prestigious because it does not occur within the corporate culture.

The sales assistants understand that the social type of the sales assistant is too fixed within the organization for them to transcend the boundaries. They need to, in their words, "go away and get some status." This belief, however, leaves them resigned to the fact that it is impossible to achieve status within the position of sales assistant. The sales assistants do not strive for recognition from the corporate culture. The influence the sales assistants try to exert is through manipulation. Manipulation is power in disguise; no recognition of the power can break through the facade. The sales assistants may be successful in achieving that which they want through manipulation but no true sense of power is ever realized.

The sales assistants are not in the habit of making direct appeals. For instance, they are told by personnel, when they are hired, that there is room for growth within the organization. Once hired, they learn that the common sense of the organization is quite different. They do speak among themselves of the dichotomy between that which was presented by personnel and that which they have learned as the common sense knowledge of the organization. They do not, however, express this dichotomy to a corporate representative.

The sales assistants perform the rites of passage known as "floating" and "standing up to the buyer". These are initiation rites into the female subculture. While "floating," the new sales assistant is tested by fellow sales assistants. Demands are placed upon the new sales assistant and the preferred behavior is to accept them. Once she has been assigned to work for one sales representative,

she has completed this rite of passage and is a member of the female subculture. Like most initiation rites, the passage provides the sales assistants with a sense of place and belonging. The rite marks her inclusion into the female subculture and exclusion from the corporate culture. Once a sales assistant, she completes another rite of passage. In "standing up to the buyer", the sales assistant is tested by the buyer. She must, in the successful completion of this rite, prove competency to the buyer and prove to her fellow sales assistants that she is not a push over. The sales assistant who does not successfully complete this rite will be constantly harassed by the buyers and mocked by fellow sales assistants.

The structure at Katz is such that the sales assistants are placed within a female subculture and the social type of the sales assistant justifies this placement. This particular structure, however, could not be accomplished without a firmly entwined system of cultural forms all working to maintain the existing social order. One significant action on the part of the corporate culture which encourages the preservation and maintenance of the female subculture and the entire social order is the company's extreme infrequency in promoting from within the female subculture of the sales assistant.

Johnson and Benson quote the sociologist Karl Mannheim as stating that:

> those who are satisfied with the existing order of things are only too likely to set up the chance situations of the moment as absolute and eternal in order to have something stable to hold on to and to minimize the hazardousness of life. This cannot be done, however, without resorting to all sorts of romantic notions and myths.[62]

The research data of this study concludes that the desire to create an absolute and eternal order is indeed a strong and powerful force. The research of the Silver sales team adds to Mannheim's thesis that for some, this desire is equally as strong for those who are dissatisfied with the current existing social order. The exper-

iencing of the social environment as a natural fact makes the pull in this direction compelling. The preservation and maintenance of the existing order of the Silver sales team is a social accomplishment produced by both the corporate culture and the female subculture. The female subculture serves as the complementary counterpart to the corporate culture in the accomplishment of this goal.

Footnotes

[1] Two most noteworthy supporters for this perspective are Clifford Geertz and and Hannah Arendt.

Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), p.5. "Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of a law but an interpretative one in search of meaning."

Hannah Arendt as quoted by David Luban, "Explaining Dark Times: Hannah Arendt's Theory of Theory," Social Research, 50 (Spring, 1983), 218. "Other forms of explanation regarding phenomena, such as the construction of law-like generalities, or empirically testable hypotheses, are inadequate since they are cut loose from any genuine role within human knowledge."

[2] Geertz, p. 10.

[3] Michael E. Pacanowsky and Nick O'Donnel-Trujillo, "Communication and Organizational Cultures," Western Journal of Speech Communication, 1982, 46, pp. 124-126.

[4] Bro Uttal, "The Corporate Culture Vultures," Fortune, Oct. 17, 1983, p.66

[5] Hannah Arendt, Between Past and Future, (1961; rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 211-212.

[6] Arendt, p.213.

[7] Arendt, pp. 259 and 231.

[8] The definition from Idahlynn Karre, "Stereotyped Sex Roles and Self Concept: Strategies for Liberating the Sexes," Communication Education, 1976, 25, pp. 43-44.

[9] The best conceptual parallel to what I am describing is Michel Foucault's concept of power. Foucault describes power as a practical accomplishment which results from the multiplicity of power relations at work in a particular area. Alan Sheridan, Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth, (New York: Tavistock Publications, 1980), p. 183.

[10] Roland Barthes, Mythologies trans. Annette Lavers, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957), p. 142.

[11] Barthes, pp. 151-155.

[12] Barthes, p. 154.

[13] Barthes, pp. 154-155.

[14] Barthes, p. 151.

[15] Barthes, p. 153.

[16] Barthes, p. 153.

[17] Barthes, p. 153.

[18] Barthes, p. 154.

[19] Barthes, p. 151.

[20] Kenneth Leiter, A Primer on Ethnomethodology, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 162.

[21] Leiter, pp. 5-11.

[22] Leiter, p.5.

[23] Leiter, p. 201.

[24] Barthes, p. 142.

[25] Barthes, p. 142 and Leiter, p. 237.

[26] Leiter, p. 11.

[27] This analogy drawn from the works of Heidegger and Saussure by Nick O'Donnel-Trujillo in "The Interpretation of Organizational Cultures." Unpublished manuscript, 1981.

[28] Leiter, p. 201.

[29] Leiter, pp. 70-71.

[30] Leiter, p. 187.

[31] See Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), Margaret Hennig and Ann Jardim, The Managerial Woman (New York: Pocket Books, 1976), p. 53; Bonnie Mc D. Johnson and Thomas W. Benson, "Gender Difference and Leadership Contention: A Case Study in the Rhetoric of Social Science," ERIC Document ED 093 002, April 1974 (Microfiche edition).

[32] Gilligan, pp. 8-9.

[33] Gilligan, pp. 10-11.

[34] Hennig and Jardim, p. 139.

[35] Hennig and Jardim, p. 53.

[36] As defined by Gregory Bateson, Steps to an Ecology of Mind, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), pp. 271-278.

[37] I am using the term "exception female" in the sense of how Hannah Arendt speaks of the "exception few". She describes this group as those who are separate from their brethren because of their advances in wealth and/or education yet very much tied to them by family loyalties and/or religious convictions. See Elizabeth Young-Bruelk, Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982, p. 272.).

[38] Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), II, p. 105.

[39] Cassirer, p. 103.

[40] Suzanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942) p. 153.

[41] Langer, p. 153.

[42] Owen Barfield, Saving the Appearances (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., n.d.), p. 12.

[43] Barthes, p. 11.

[44] Barthes, p. 64.

[45] Leiter, p. 6.

[46] American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (New York Dell Publishing, 1973), p. 730.

[47] Barthes, p. and Leiter, p. 7.

[48] Hannah Arendt, The Life of the Mind (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), pp. 31-34.

[49] Arendt, The Life of the Mind, p. 76.

[50] Barthes, p. 113.

[51] Leiter, pp. 5-11.

[52] Geertz, p. 10.

[53] For a discussion of self-fulfilling prophecy, see Paul Watzlawich, Janet Helmick Beavin, Don D. Jackson, Pragmatics of Human Communication (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1967), pp. 98-99.

[54] Lorraine B. Code, "Responsibility and the Epistemic Community: Woman's Place," Social Research, 1983, 50, 548.

[55] Code, p. 537.

[56] Code, p. 549.

[57] Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson, p. 31.

[58] Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson, pp. 67-68.

[59] Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson, p. 31.

[60] Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson, p. 31.

[61] Geertz, p. 140.

[62] Bonnie Mc D. Johnson and Thomas W. Benson, "Gender Differences and Leadership Contention: A Case Study in the Rhetoric of Social Research," unpublished manuscript, p. 24.

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